

Adaptation of Western TV Formats In China---A Case of *The Voice of China*

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Abstract

Adaptation of Western TV Formats In China---A Case of *The Voice of China*

Die Ruan

The purpose of the study was to analyze how western TV formats adapt to Chinese television market and take *The Voice of China* as an example. A case study explored the successful factors of the show including content analysis and questionnaire survey.

Through questionnaire surveys among one hundred participants in 18-49 aged group and interview with professional producers, the researcher explored how did *The Voice of China* appeal audience and what channels did the audience get the information about this show. The research of The Voice of China's successful format might become a weather vane of introducing TV formats to Chinese market, which also guided television producers to create more adaptable shows for Chinese audiences' viewing habit.

Meanwhile, regards to western TV formats' distributors, they will have some practical experience when they decide to export formats to China and other Asian countries.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

With the development of international format trade, more and more western program formats are spread in every corner of the world. Whether the first of its kind in reality TV show *Big Brother* or the world-famous singing competition *The Voice*, TV formats are gradually to be widely known.

In September 2010, *The Voice of Holland*, which was created by John de Mol and Roel van Velzen, launched on RTL4, a Dutch major commercial television station. From the first season, its debut attracted more than three million people to watch the show every Friday, which accounts for 18.2 per cent of Dutch population. The final attracted 3,744,000 viewers and, after broadcasting for half an hour, the results show saw 3,238,000 tuning in to watch the 27-year-old's victory. These are the highest figure ever for a Dutch talent show ("And the voice of Holland," 2011). *The Voice of Holland* created such a buzz that it is being adapted in other countries such as the United States and the UK. In the following year, based on the concept of *The Voice of Holland*, NBC

launched the American version of *The Voice* and it became the biggest rival of this flagship show *American Idol*'s immediately. An average of 8,420,000 people saw the first series premiere of *The Voice UK*, which became BBC One's biggest new entertainment series on record. The rating of premiere extended far beyond other reality series including *X Factor*, *Strictly Come Dancing* and *Britain's Got Talent* ("The Voice UK," 2012). Except for the above two countries, France, Germany and Korea also purchased the format of *The Voice* and launched their own versions.

On July 2012, the format of *The Voice* was introduced to Chinese market. Its unique format of blind audition made the show become the hot issue among the public. Within a few hours of its first airing, *The Voice of China*, which premiered on Zhejiang Satellite Television, turned out to be an instant hit and forever changed the landscape of Chinese television broadcasting ("How The Voice of China rose to success, " 2012).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Comparing with other countries, Chinese TV station's reaction toward introduced

TV formats is somehow sluggish. As China's second-most-watched channel, Hunan TV launched a format television shows in 2007 which originally from BBC's *Just the Two of Us*, a reality singing contest show gathered eight famous singers team up with other celebrities from different areas ("Watson Pulls Out of Talent Show," 2006). For the first season it gained top ratings of programs in the same time slots. Since then, an increasing number of Chinese provincial satellite TV stations began to buy overseas TV formats hoping to copy the success of Hunan Satellite TV's *Just the Two of Us*. From the first introduced game show formats to various talent shows, most of format television shows received high ratings as they expected.

However, not all is that lucky, some shows left the screen before they were well known to audience. *Thank God You're Here*, the most successful new show in Australia in 2006, was sold to China and CCTV One launched Chinese version in 2011 ("Paul Merton," 2006). After good ratings of earlier episodes, the following ratings didn't climb up as they expected. Besides, Dragon Television also bought format *Sing It* from Holland and it premiered on April 2007. This show provides ordinary men and women a chance to

show their anger, love, frustration, regret, or give secret thanks to, in unprecedented musical way, the person to whom it is intended for (“Sing It,” n.d.). Compared with original version, there is a problem that most of guests were hard to express their real feelings on camera and the results did not reach the desired effect. Currently, *Sing It* was cancelled on Dragon Television after airing two seasons (Han, 2012).

In terms of introduced oversea format television, the first problem is that how to adapt to Chinese television market. But the majority of format proprietors are reluctant to revise the program. The proprietor of *The Voice* has strict requirements regarding plot making, lighting, music, and stage artistic design. *The Voice of China*’s promo, logo, coaches’ gesture, iconic red background has adhered more closely to its original Dutch format. During the first episode recording, directors from *The Voice* even offered field guidance and gave advice about lighting and acoustics. Except for stage settings, the proprietors also claimed selection of judges, contests and live band (Zhang, 2012). Therefore, since the process has to be strictly followed up the format, a tricky problem arose: how to meet psychological demand of Chinese audience without sacrificing core

format.

Apart from *The Voice of China*, major state-level TV stations also introduced a variety of different talent shows including *American Idol*, *X Factor* and *Got Talent*. These format televisions have all received a powerful wave of ratings, but why only *The Voice of China* became China's most hit show and a hot trending topic on the popular Sina Weibo micro blog? Are there any more factors, except for its unique blind audition, promoting it to override other popular shows?

1.3 Background and Need

For the case of *Thank God You're Here*, the performers of the original version are relatively fixed and they all from a same sitcom and they are all good at making funny effect. However, due to the immature development of TV show's genre in Chinese market, most of contestants are not comedian in CCTV's version. This could be one of the problems when overseas TV formats are introducing to China. On the other side, cultural difference may lead to opposite ways of expressing feelings and emotions between Eastern and Western contestants. As a result, CCTV's version cannot capture essence

from the original one and that's why it failed to achieve the expected effects.

The improvisational comedy, such as *Thank God You're Here*, has many features including fixed comedians and occidental form of expression. Audiences from China may find hard to understand these features if the format were imported to China. However, singing competition program does not have such problems. It is suitable for a variety of cultures. Instead of copying in exactly the same way of original version, *The Voice of China* has made some localized changes, aiming to adapt to Chinese audience viewing habits. Different from the fact that European and American versions punctuate individual's music performance, Chinese version places more focus on telling the story behind the music (Zhang, 2012). Taking one ninety-minute episode as an example, every contestant possesses five or six minutes for performing and interaction with judges, two or three minutes for story telling. Adding this part is not only because of developing vivid characters and individual styles, but also inspires audience to think of the bright side even in adversity and bring the positive energy to the audience.

With no doubt, *The Voice of China* became the most hit show during the year of

2012 and forever changed the landscape of Chinese television market. Combination of mature format and Chinese adaptation, purely on the basis of talents' voices, celebrity effect of judges, and integrated marketing strategy all play an important role to promote *The Voice of China's* continuous high ratings. Besides, a new form of organizing the collaboration between the TV station and the production company has also contributed to the show's success. Zhejiang TV is responsible for promotion and commercial sales; as the producer, Canxing Productions Company ensures the quality and the performance of the show. This kind of joint venture has never appeared in Chinese broadcasting history, both parties share both the revenue and the risk (Ye, 2012).

Additionally, in order to attract more attention, Zhejiang TV managed to invite four famous Chinese celebrities including renowned musician Liu Huan, who sang the Beijing Olympics theme *You and Me* with Sarah Brightman, pop diva Na Ying, mainland singer Yang Kun, and Taiwan singer-songwriter Harlem Yu to come on as the show's coaches (Zhang, 2012). With a wealth of Chinese music circle network resources, these four judges not only can provide contestants professional guidance but also offer more

opportunities and wider stage for ordinary people who pursuit their own musical dreams.

Apart from this, *The Voice of China* also put forth their best effort in integrated marketing communications, by means of reorganizing and integrating various ways of communication such as advertisings, promotions, public relations, news, and events to build its brand image and achieve the greatest level of communication (Lu & Wang, 2012).

1.4 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to utilize the case of *The Voice of China* to explore which factors contribute to its success and how to adapt to Chinese television market as a western TV format by interviewing and questionnaire survey in different age groups.

In order to research *The Voice of China* and other western versions, this study takes *The Voice of America* as a reference to compare with *The Voice of China* in terms of format. Which factors are retained and which factors are added on for the sake of localizing adaptation will be discussed. Whether these new factors promote the show's

success is also one of the researching problems. Through questionnaire surveys among one hundred participants in 18-49 aged group and interview with professional producers, the researcher explored how does *The Voice of China* appeal audience and what channels does the audience get the information about this show. It is important to study why *The Voice of China* turned out to be an unexpected success, especially when the TV market is basically oversaturated among the large numbers of other similar reality talent shows that are coming to viewers on a daily basis.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What is the difference between *The Voice* in America and *The Voice of China* in terms of the format?
2. What is *The Voice of China*'s promotional strategy and which is the most crucial one?
3. How does the format of *The Voice* adapt to Chinese market?

1.6 Significance to the Field

In terms of Chinese television market, format TV started late and is still relatively immature. The research of *The Voice of China*'s successful format may become a weather vane of introducing TV formats to Chinese market, which also guides television producers to create more adaptable shows for Chinese audiences' viewing habit. Meanwhile, regards to format trade of western reality TV shows, this study also bring practical references when TV formats are exported to China and other Asian countries.

1.7 Definitions

Format TV - A television format is “a program or program concept, with distinct elements that can be exported and licensed to production companies or broadcasters outside its country of origin for local adaptation” (Schmitt, 2005).

Format Trade - Two Definitions

Format trade - “A combination of self-commissioned production and program imports. Self-production is realized by the broadcasters or in collaboration with production

companies” (Moran, 2009). Or, even clearer “A format sale is a product sale. The product in this instance is a recipe for reproducing a successful television program, in another territory, as a local program” (Bodycombe, 2005).

International Format Trade - International format trade can be defined as “selling and purchasing licenses for TV formats between an exporting licensor and an importing licensee. The licensee is thus granted the opportunity to adapt the format to the needs of the domestic TV market and to achieve a balance between cost-efficient standardization and cultural differentiation” (Moran, 2009).

Integrated Marketing Communications - Integrated Marketing Communications is “a strategic marketing process specifically designed to ensure that all messaging and communications strategies are unified across all channels and are centered around the customer” (“What is IMC?”, n.d.).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In order to study and analyze the localization of western shows in the international television industry, *The Voice of China*, one of the most popular shows in the Chinese television market, is a great case to research. This thesis will address three areas of research related to the success of *The Voice of China*. In the first section, research studies are to compare *The Voice of China* with other western format television in terms of the format. The second section focuses on the promotional strategy of *The Voice of China*. Finally, the third section discusses study pertaining to the development of television formats in Chinese market.

2.2 The Format of *The Voice of China*

Purchasing television formats from other countries is the main method of production in Chinese market. With the mature experience and plentiful marketing research, the well-known format of *The Voice* was introduced to Zhejiang Satellite Television.

Apart from its unique blind audition, a new way of collaboration between the production company and the TV station has also contributed to the show's success. In the Chinese market, production companies usually provide creative ideas and handle the entire production process from scratch. According to the estimated rating and advertising sales, the broadcaster will make a decision whether to buy the format after viewing the pilot (Ye, 2012). After receiving a fixed production fee, there will be no more profits for the production company, despite of the amount of income generated by commercial sales. In order to maximize profits, this cooperation model usually forces the production company to cut production expenses, which may have a negative effect on the quality of show to some extent. However, the new partnership of Canxing and Zhejiang TV puts them share both the revenue and the risk. It is unprecedented in China's TV broadcasting history for a production company and a TV station to form a joint venture (Ye, 2012). With the purpose of maximizing the profit, Canxing Productions Company, as the content provider, invested a large sum of money to make sure that everything including preliminary work, lighting engineer, live sound, outline of the script, stage setting, audio

post production to coaches, bands, and technicians were top level talents. Besides, Zhejiang TV put forth their best effort in commercial sales to successfully appeal a soft drink company JiaDuoBao endorses the show with a 60 million yuan for title sponsorship (Zhao, 2012).

This bidding war drove the placement during the show to be sold for 360 thousand yuan per 15-second slot. The joint efforts of the two sides soon paid off and saw the joint venture start turning a profit merely two weeks since the program went to air. According to the latest statistics from CSM Media Research, *The Voice of China* topped nationwide ratings when its was shown on every Friday night, attracting 1.5, 2.77, 3.09, 3.34, and 3.302 percent of the country's television audience for the first five episodes of blind audition shows. Even re-runs of the show got higher ratings than the premieres of any other talent music show this year ("*The Voice of China*", 2012). It can be conservatively estimated that the total soft and hard advertising revenues generated from the first season of *The Voice of China* is somewhere between 250 million and 270 million yuan.

2.3 Promotional Strategy

In terms of promotional strategy, *The Voice of China* fully utilize integrated marketing communications to manage its brand image and interactive with potential audiences through multiple mediums.

Usually, on-air communication instruments were highly used for a retentive strategy (Eick, 2007). By the first round of blind audition on August 17th, Zhejiang TV broadcasted a title sponsorship promo 3,392 times in total. The minute-long promo was scheduled to run 17 times a day on average from June 11th until June 30th. As the date of premier approached, frequency of the promo up to 27 times every day at prime time period. During the debut day, the figure is as high as 70 times and still remains high frequency on non-air day. The above data is one of the reasons to explain why *The Voice of China* became a hot trending topic instantly.

Additionally, keeping suspense and generate online buzz plays an essential role to attract public's attention. Since the first episode of *The Voice of China* was aired on Zhejiang TV, there was a steady stream of queries coming at the authenticity of the

stories of competitors in this show. On the one hand, high quality of production and high-end equipment are important keys to success. Jin Lei, the director of the show, mentioned “From the black suits, black background, lighting and stage setting, to the position of the microphone. There are 27 cameras in the studio, ready to capture every detail of coaches and contestants; even the four original red chairs were imported from Great Britain. The sound system cost an unprecedented 20 million Yuan (US\$3.14 million), more than the total cost of a New Year’s Eve Gala” (Zhang, 2012). On the other hand, the spinning chairs were questioned if they were worthy of those astronomical costs. Furthermore, Jin said, “The good voice is the only standard to judge the vocal performance of singers instead of their appearance, jobs and other background factors. This format has never been seen before on any Chinese TV show and its producers make it one of the most heartwarming and story-telling shows ever when they show the coaches interacting with candidates, professionally, gracefully and wittily” (Zhang, 2012). However, most of the media disputed that some contestants told bittersweet stories in order to get sympathy and attention from coaches and audience. These hot topics received

huge amount of attention and have been debated intensely on Internet. Undoubtedly, *The Voice of China* is successfully using the power of event marketing to expand its awareness.

Emerging digital media technology is subtly changing habits and expectations of traditional media (Hampton, Goulet, Raine, & Purcell, 2011). A growing number of social network websites make the television become more interactive, and many of media platforms that people choose are based on the information that they get from their friends online.

According to a report from *the Hollywood Reporter*, 88% of respondents view social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook as a new form of entertainment. The time spent watching full-length movies or television shows on a weekly basis is eight hours. 79% of connected television viewers visit Facebook while watching TV. Additionally, 83% surf the web while viewing TV and 41% tweet about the show they're watching (Solis, 2012).

The main advantage of Facebook or Twitter is that it allows television producers and

advertisers to get instantaneous feedback about their programming. Most of viewers could tweet in real-time during the show about what has already happened or even about what they think is going to happen (Bennett, n.d.). Instead of waiting hours and days of writing critics on newspaper or magazine, producers and media companies could know the most audiences' opinion of the show. Sina Weibo, a Chinese micro blog website, with a market penetration similar to Twitter and possess over 500 million registered users so far (Ropoza, 2011).

Television networks are taking advantage of this large market to engage with their fans. For instance, many television shows now display hashtags in the bottom corner of the screen during shows so fans can easily get on Weibo and see what others are talking about the show. Anyone can search these hashtags on Weibo and follow along, even if they don't want to participate in the conversation (Hunt, 2014). *The Voice of China* also built its official Weibo to attract more audience to interact with judges and contestants. Viewers who follow this official account may receive a large number of latest information and news related to *The Voice of China*. All of the judges are active on Weibo,

as well as most of the contestants.

Besides, the celebrity effect on Weibo also plays a crucial role to boost the high attention of this show. After *The Voice of China*'s debut, Yao Chen, a Chinese actress with the largest number of followers on Weibo, tweet a message "the show focuses on how to look at the bright side of any given situation and how to give people positive energy" (Yao, 2012). Many celebrities forwarded this tweet and they possess sheer bulks of followers on Weibo, which are over 300 million in total at that time. Although it is a little bit exaggerated to state that it has reached three hundred million audiences directly, it is still very influential even it attracts half of those three hundred million audiences. Moreover, celebrities tweet #voice one after another. It is the best commercial ever for *The Voice of China* (Lu & Wang, 2012). There is no doubt that integrated marketing communications have been a significant factor in the show's winning recipe.

2.4 Format Trade In China

The past five years have been the golden age for Chinese TV reality shows. They

have grown in number and variety, and they dominate weekend primetime hours on almost every major broadcaster. Since 2009, there are more than 30 authorized format TV shows in Chinese television market. Nearly all of these programs originally came from Europe including BBC, London-based FremantleMedia, and the Dutch production companies Talpa and Endemol. All of the above have so far been the main suppliers of these program formats. Half of the shows are aired on Hunan TV, Shanghai's Dragon TV, Zhejiang TV and Jiangsu TV, arguably China's four most-watched satellite channels (Han, 2012). Hunan TV, China's second-most-watched channel and leading entertainment broadcasters, took the initiative by producing authorized Chinese versions of the UK-originated *Strictly Come Dancing* and *Just the Two of Us* in 2007 (Zhang, 2011).

Instead of copying a foreign show, Chinese producers prefer to buy the right to the TV formats. They have a chance to gain a full measure of production experience in addition to learning from the concept editing done by the original channels. The producers are usually given a formula, which they call the "Format Bible". This offers guidelines on production processes, some as detailed as where to place a camera and how

to switch a scene. But even with this imported technological support, many reproductions in China are far from successful. Most have had mediocre success, earning less than a rating of 1, which is far from satisfactory, considering the reported millions of Yuan Chinese broadcasters have thrown into the purchase (Han, 2012).

In terms of this dilemma, Lu Wei, the Publicity Director of Canxing Production, thinks the reason is obvious: “The program format itself is not omnipotent. If the local production team is not well trained, the final result won't be good. What the bible offers is simply a framework of ideas. You can only effectively apply it after you think out why they are doing it so” (Han, 2012). With such devotion to learning, Lu said Canxing has trained a high-level editing team while producing the Chinese version of *Got Talent*, which has become the first huge success in the reproduction genre. The show reached 600 million viewers and had a whopping 5.91 rating in its Sunday primetime slot on Dragon TV in July 2011, in China, shows with as little as a 1.3 rating are usually seen as hits (Han, 2012).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This case study followed a qualitative content analysis of format difference in *The Voice of China*, the promotional strategy and the development of format trade in Chinese television market. Interviews and questionnaires are used to collect data with the intention of discussing *The Voice of China*'s adaptation in China.

The research questions of this study included the following:

1. What is the difference between *The Voice* in America and *The Voice of China* in terms of the format?
2. What is *The Voice of China*'s promotional strategy and which is the most crucial one?
3. How does the format of *The Voice* adapt to Chinese market?

3.2 Criteria for Content Analysis

In order to answer the question that what is the difference between *The Voice of China* and other western editions, the researcher chose to study *The Voice of America*, a

hit singing competition show broadcast on NBC. According to Nielsen ratings, the first season of *The Voice of America* delivered the highest 18–49 rating for a series premiere on a major broadcast network since *Undercover Boss* debuted after the Super Bowl in February 2010 (Robert, 2011). Excluding sports, its 5.1 rating was NBC's highest in the time period since May 12, 2009 (Lynette, 2011).

The Voice of China and *The Voice of America* were based on the original *The Voice of Holland* and both of them achieved great success in the respective markets. In terms of the competition rules, these two editions followed the same standard that only judged by the power, clarity, type and uniqueness of contestants' singing prowess. In the matter of format, they all had blind auditions, battle rounds, and final live performance. The winner was determined by voting through telephone, Internet, SMS text. The only difference was *The Voice of America* and the original edition was aired in western countries. *The Voice of China* was premiered in Asian country with different culture background. Nevertheless, it had a great influence in Chinese television market. On the original basis, whether the factor needed to be added or deleted was one of the research questions to be discussed in

this study.

Additionally, another content analysis focused on the development of format trade in Chinese television market. The researcher listed a variety of TV formats on the Chinese major satellite TV stations. According to these shows, whether the format was popular and if the format would be cancelled very soon was another research question in this study. In a competitive television marketplace, how did *The Voice of China* make adaptations to appeal Chinese audience?

3.3 Setting

In order to better understand the second and third research question, this study was created and distributed a survey via Wenjuan, an online survey software that provide the researcher with a quick statistical analysis based on the raw data being complied. Except for emailing surveys, participants were also randomly selected to answer questionnaire face to face.

3.4 Sample

Random sample was used in this study. The selected individuals all realized and

watched *The Voice of China*. Some of them watched *The Voice of America*. The participants in the study were from diverse background and different age group. In order to obtain a distribution of responses across all age group, at least seventeen individuals in each age group were conducted. The participants were all answered same questions, which resulted in a total of 112 responses. Their age was divided into three brackets, 77 were from age 18-35, 18 were from age 36-49, and 17 were above age 50.

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected through interviews and questionnaire. The interviews were collected from publishable interviews of related television producers and divided into different section. Specific interview questions were matched to answer the first question of the format difference between *The Voice of China* and *The Voice of America*. Specific survey questions were also matched to specific research questions. The collecting progress lasted approximately one month. Data from the survey were transcribed and categorized in the areas of promotional strategy and the adaptation of *The Voice of China*. The results were presented in numbers, percentage and graphs.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The data analysis for the interviews and the survey brought forth answers to the research questions mentioned before. In order to answer the first question, the researcher used a content analysis of scholarly works and publishing interviews by reputable individuals in the Chinese television market. To answer the second and third research questions, questionnaire was utilized for this purpose. Based on the collected statistics, the researcher analyzed the promotional strategy of *The Voice of China* and the development of television formats in China.

4.2 What is the difference between *The Voice* in America and *The Voice of China* in terms of the format?

Compared to the four rounds of blind auditions in *The Voice of America*, *The Voice of China* changed this process to six rounds based on the Chinese audiences' viewing habits. The final optimization plans included six blind auditions, two rounds for judges' selection, one battle round, and one final performance (Wang, 2012). In terms of blind

audition process, every coach could select eight contestants to form their team in the first season of *The Voice* in America. For the Chinese edition, each coach might add extra four candidates in their team.

Besides, *The Voice of China* focused on exploring the music stories behind the contestants instead of only emphasizing the vocal performance. “If the full mark is five points, the vocal performance accounts for three points and the story telling takes two points. The story of the contestants will not affect the decision of the judges because every coach is going to make a decision first and then the contestant has an opportunity to share the story. Not only the good voice should be remembered, but also the voice’s owner”, Lu Wei, the show’s publicity director, said in an interview of *Southern Weekly* (Wang, 2012). Taking a ninety-minute-episode as an example, every contestant possessed seven to eight minutes for appearance. The live performance and the comments of judges cost five to six minutes. They have only two to three minutes to tell the story. Producer of *The Voice of China* Tian Ming said, “In terms of two minutes, will you rather enjoy their most exciting journey of music or just listen to a simple resume” (Wang, 2012).

4.3 What is *The Voice of China*'s promotional strategy and which is the most crucial one?

Following the collection of questionnaire responses from 112 participants, 56.25% were male and 43.75% were female. The age distribution of the survey showed 68.75% between the ages of age 18-35, 16.07% between age 36-49, and 15.18% above age 50 (Figure 1).

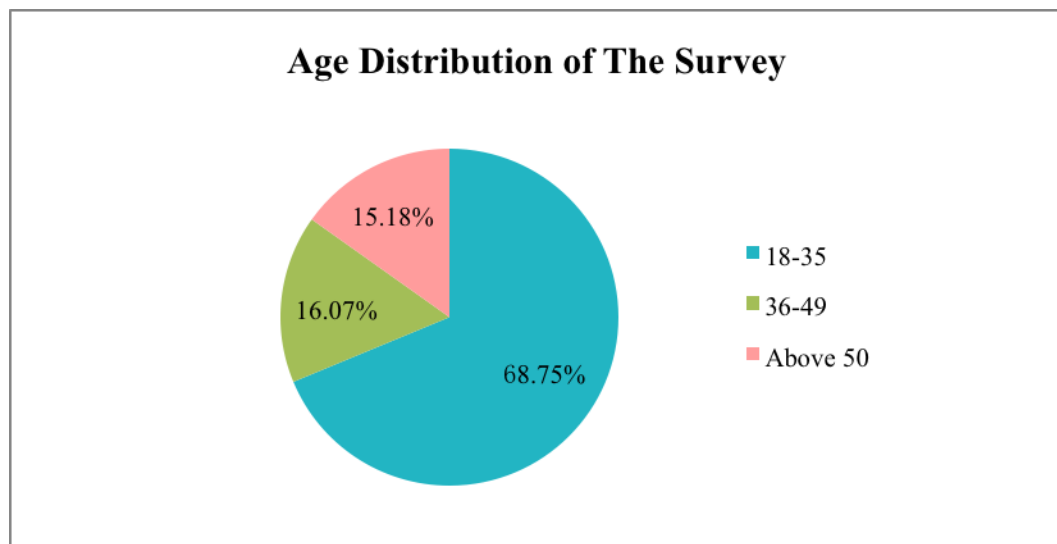


Figure 1: Age Distribution of The Survey

Since this survey was conducted to the participants who watched *The Voice of China*,

most of participants in 18-35 age group indicated this kind of TV format was more popular among the young generation. Question three intended to unveil how audience got to know *The Voice of China*. The results showed that 60.71% were from television, 30.36% were from social media including Weibo, Renren, and Wechat (Figure 2). Renren has been called the Facebook of China, popular amongst college students. Wechat is a Chinese mobile text and voice messaging communication service and its total users reached 600 millions worldwide (Liu, 2013). All of them are most popular social networking in China. Besides, 49.11% of participants indicated that the vocal performance of the contestants was the main factor to attract them to watch *The Voice of China*. Meanwhile, 20.54% of participants preferred to watch this show because of the four judges' celebrity effect (Figure 3).

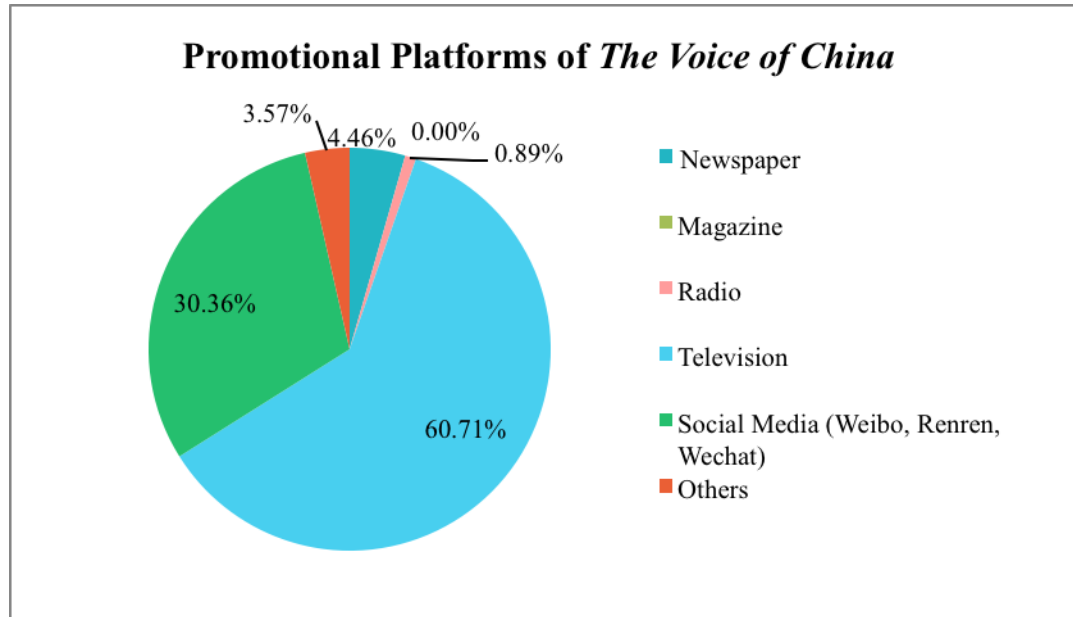


Figure 2: Promotional Platforms of *The Voice of China*

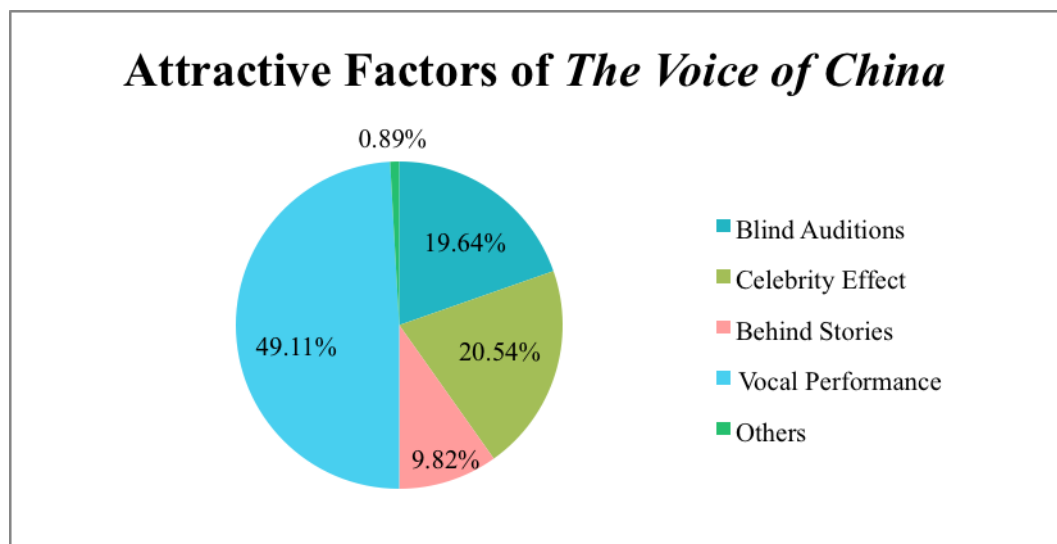


Figure 3: Attractive Factors of *The Voice of China*

As the researcher mentioned in Chapter Two, except for the traditional communication strategy, *The Voice of China* also focused on the new media and event marketing. According to the literature review and the research results, the researcher could summarize six key promotional strategies of *The Voice of China*.

First of all, meet demands. Compared to other talent shows, *The Voice of China* delivered an unprecedented format to audience and provided contestants an opportunity to share the behind stories. It is hard to say that the unique blind audition was not the most attractive factor. To some extent, audiences preferred to wait for the moment of judges turned their chairs around to face the contestants for the first time.

Secondly is high quality. Based on the successful experience of the original one, *The Voice of China* put forth their best effort make sure that everything including preliminary work, lighting engineer, live sound, outline of the script, stage setting, audio post production to coaches, bands, and technicians were high quality.

Thirdly is interactive marketing. Different contestants were shaped by their stories and these stories could strike a chord in the hearts of many audiences. Took account of

differences between individuals, this strategy might target different audience and allowed them to participate in the process of building the brand image of *The Voice of China*.

Fourthly is celebrity effect. The show invited four famous Chinese celebrities including renowned musician Liu Huan, pop diva Na Ying, mainland singer Yang Kun, and Taiwan singer-songwriter Harlem Yu to come on as the coaches. This judging panel appealed many other celebrities' communication on Weibo.

Fifthly, event marketing played a crucial role to attract public's attention. Either the queries of spinning chairs or the bittersweet stories, *The Voice of China* was successfully using the power of event marketing to expand its awareness.

Finally, and the most important is the new media strategy. Not only *The Voice of China* built its official Weibo, judges and contestants were also active on Weibo. It is important to fully arouse the initiative of viewers and engage them to create buzz.

4.4 How does the format of *The Voice* adapt to Chinese market?

In recent years, Chinese television market has changed dramatically. More satellite channels are available to the viewer as provincial broadcasters seek to branch out and

establish their position (Moran, 2009). In order to minimize the risk of producing a new TV format, Chinese broadcasters used to purchase mature foreign formats. More than thirty authorized reproductions of foreign reality shows aired on satellite channels since 2009, half of the shows were aired on Hunan TV, Shanghai's Dragon TV, Zhejiang TV and Jiangsu TV, arguably China's four most-watched satellite channels (Table 1).

Table 1: A list of programs aired by Chinese TV Channels and their original names and formats (continued)

Hunan Satellite Channel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Mingsheng Dazhen</i> (September, 2007), a reality-singing contest based on the BBC's <i>Just the Two of Us</i>, UK. ● <i>Wudong Qiji</i> (November, 2007), a celebrity dancing show based on the BBC's <i>Strictly Come Dancing</i>, UK. ● <i>Yiyi Dibai</i> (November, 2008), a game show based on Endemol's <i>I VS. 100</i>, the
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	<p>Netherlands.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Women Yuehuiba</i> (December, 2009), a dating show based on FremantleMedia's <i>Take Me Out</i>, UK. ● <i>Baibian Dakaxiu</i> (July, 2012), a celebrity imitation show based on Endemol's <i>Your Face Sounds Familiar</i>, the Netherlands. ● <i>Zhongguo Zuiqiangyin</i> (April, 2013), a talent show based on SYCOtv's <i>The X Factor</i>, UK.
Dragon TV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Woxin Changxiang</i> (December, 2011), a reality singing show based on Talpa Media's <i>Sing It</i>, the Netherlands. ● <i>China's Got Talent</i> (December, 2012), a reality singing contest based on Syco and Fremantle Media's <i>Got Talent</i>, UK.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Dingji Chushi</i> (July, 2012), a cooking show based on BBC's <i>Master Chef</i>, UK. ● <i>Chinese Idol</i> (May, 2013), a singing competition program based on FremantleMedia's <i>Pop Idol</i>, UK.
Zhejiang Satellite Channel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Yuetiao Yuemeili</i> (May, 2009), a weight-loss dancing competition based on 495 Productions' <i>Dance Your Ass Off</i>, US. ● <i>Zhongguo Mengxiangxiu</i> (December, 2012), a game show based on the BBC's <i>Tonight's the Night</i>, UK. ● <i>The Voice of China</i> (July, 2012), a reality singing contest based on Talpa Media's <i>The Voice</i>, the Netherlands.
Jiangsu Satellite Channel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Sheigan Laichangge</i> (May, 2009), a karaoke

	<p>style game show based on ITV Productions' <i>Who Dares, Sings</i>, UK.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Huanxi Yuanjia</i> (November, 2010), a reality show based on martial disputes based on Endemol's <i>The Marriage Ref</i>, the Netherlands. ● <i>Laogong Kannide</i> (November, 2010), a game show based on SevenOne International's <i>My Man Can</i>, Germany.
Southeast Satellite Channel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Huanle Hechanguan</i> (April, 2011), a game show based on the BBC's <i>Last Choir Standing</i>, UK. ● <i>Mingtian Jiuchufa</i> (December, 2012), a game show based on the BBC's <i>This Time Tomorrow</i>, UK.
Shenzhen Satellite Channel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Niandai Xiu</i> (December, 2011), a celebrity quiz

	<p>and game show based on DRG International's</p> <p><i>Generation Show</i>, UK.</p>
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Source: The Baidu Company, Baidu Baike.

But even with these creative TV formats, many reproductions were far from successful. *The Voice of China*, as an exception, it turned out to be an unexpected success, especially at a time when the TV market was basically oversaturated due to the large numbers of reality talent shows including *Chinese Idol*, Chinese version of *The X-Factor* and *China's Got Talent*. According to the survey results, almost sixty percent of participants selected *The Voice of China* as their favorite show among various TV formats from western countries (Figure 4).

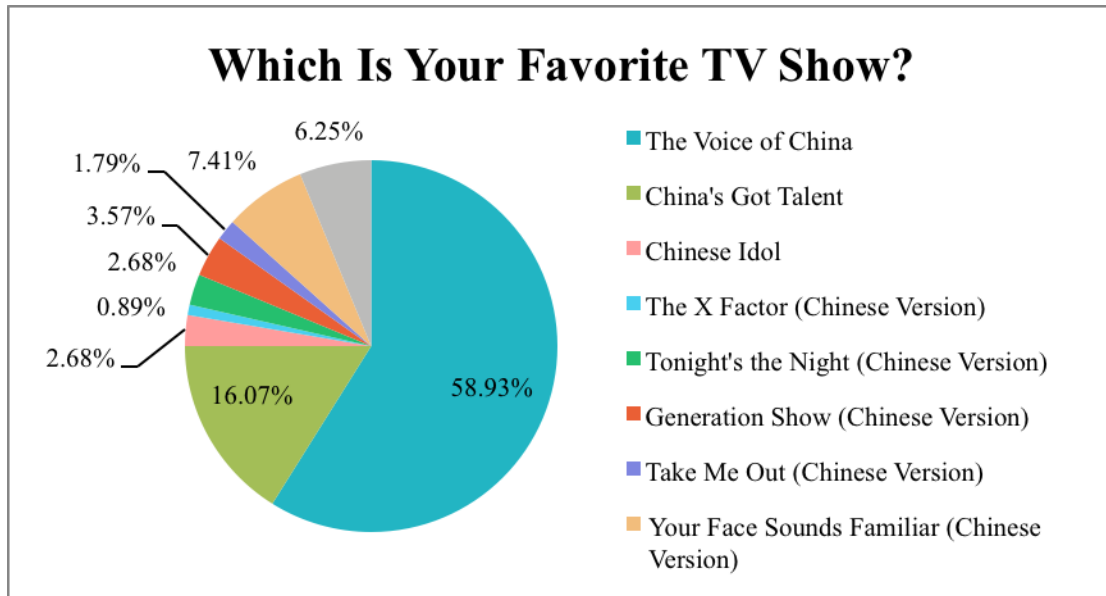


Figure 4: Which Is Your Favorite TV Shows?

Under this tight competition, which adaptation did *The Voice of China* use to promote its success was one of the research questions. In other versions of *The Voice*, the relationship between the contestants and the show would be terminated after the season finale. The production company of the show would have nothing to do with the contestants' future singing career. However, Canxing, *The Voice of China's* production company was intended to break new ground in China's music industry and build a whole chain of related products, according to Tian Ming, the head of Canxing Productions (Ye, 2012). "I've always hoped to find a good platform to fill the holes that currently exist in

China's music industry. *The Voice of China* could serve as a trigger to activate the value chain,” said Tian Ming.

In other countries, the contestants usually started off their professional singing career with getting signed by a record label. Canxing planed to form its own entertainment agency to manage these singers and develop related marketing strategies (Ye, 2012). The coaches continued to work with them as advisors as well. This new arrangement not only developed and promoted new talent, but also attracted more outstanding original musical works to revive the floundering local music scene. Additionally, *The Voice of China* launched a paid ringtone download service in partnership with China Mobile, the world's largest mobile phone operator by subscribers with over 760 million (Wang, 2012). All of the songs performed by the contestants were made into ringtones and audience could download them by one yuan.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

Chinese television market faced significant change in recent years. More and more TV formats were imported to the Chinese market and provide audience an opportunity to watch various entertainment programs. Unfortunately, not every show survived a long time on screen; most of them were just a flash in the pan. Under the hot competitive circumstances, as an ordinary talent show, how did *The Voice of China* achieve high ratings and huge profits? Compared to the different culture background of original format, how did it make adjustment in order to adapt local audience and how did it utilize new media as a promote strategy were the main purpose of this study.

5.2 Discussion

According to the CSM Media Research (Figure 5), *The Voice of China* achieved great ratings when it first aired. Moreover, the ratings continued increasing throughout that time. Ultimately, the ratings of the finale reached six percent, and seventeen percent for the shares. The first six episodes were blind auditions; next from seventh to tenth

were battle rounds; the rest four episodes were finals. The ratings of *The Voice of China* have the most rapid increase during blind auditions. According to the questionnaire, 39% of the participants chose the blind auditions as their favorite part of *The Voice of China* (Figure 6). In the following stage of battle rounds, the ratings were increasing yet steadily. There are 22% of the participants preferred to watch this stage. The ratings increased at a fast rate when it came to finale. And the data of the questionnaire indicated that 39% of the participants liked to watch finale the most. Both the ratings and the result of the questionnaire showed that it is the unique blind audition and final performance that attracted the audience.

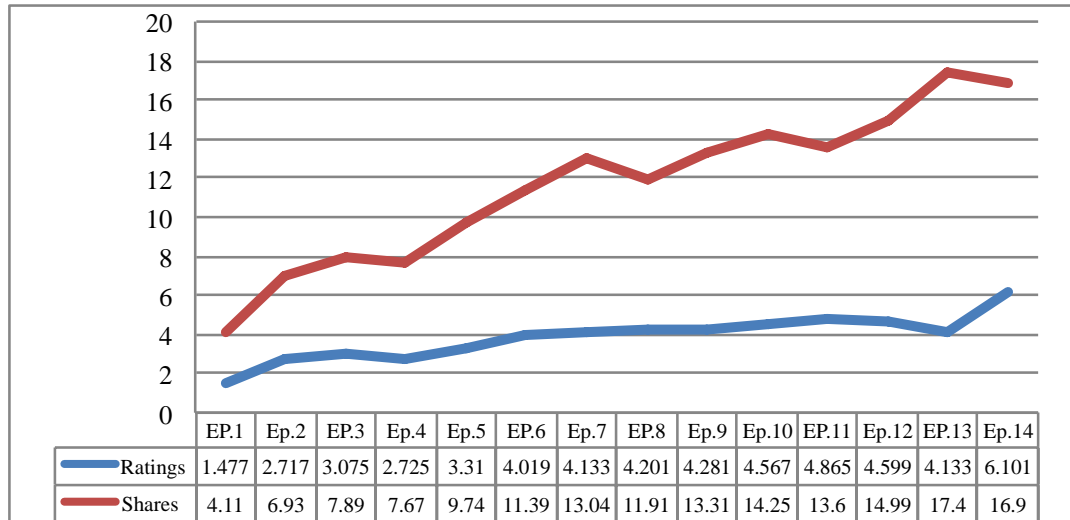


Figure 5: The Ratings of The First Season of *The Voice of China*

Source: The CSM Media Research

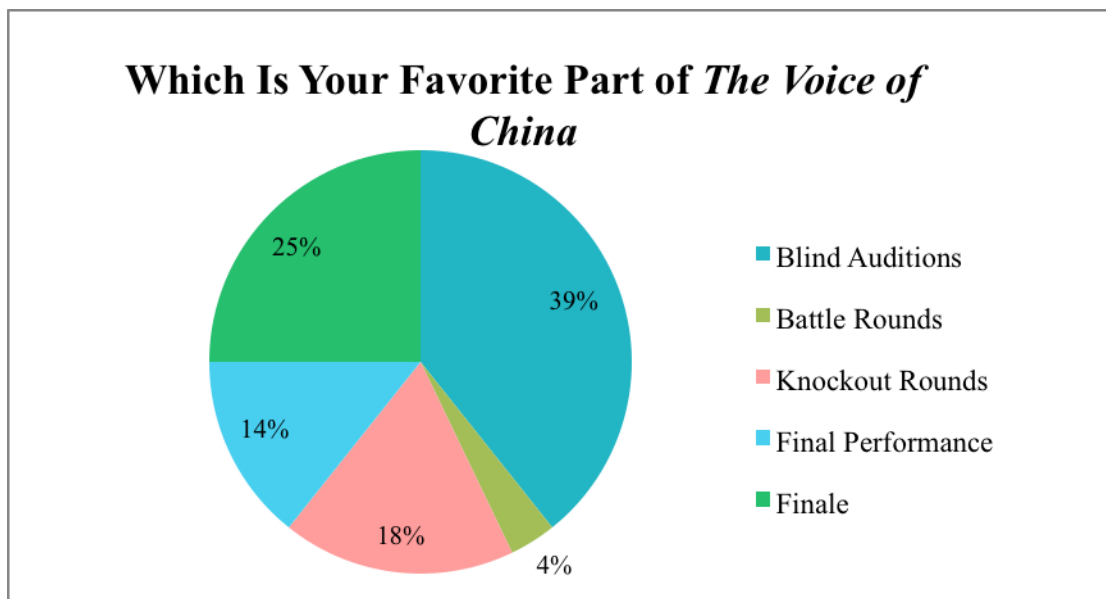


Figure 6: Which Is Your Favorite Part of *The Voice of China*

Besides, among all the talent shows that aired at the same time slot, *The Voice of China* was on the top rank (Table 2). It also possessed different viewer distribution compared to other talent shows. According to a survey conducted by CSM Media Research, *The Voice of China* attracted young generation aging from 25 to 34 (Zhao, 2012). Those who have college degrees had a higher tendency to watch it. However, the audience of other talent shows were mainly aging from 45 to 64. Such young audience groups promoted the marketing success in terms of new media. According to the report from Weibo, 53% of the subscribers are under age 22, 37% of the subscribers are between age 23-32. Over ninety percent of the subscribers aged from 25 to 34 (Bai, 2013). Additionally, *The Voice of China* also launched a spin-off show *My Real Voice* as the following program. The purpose of this show was to explore the contestants' insides through the interactive interviews. Yang Kun, one of the four coaches for *The Voice of China*, hosted *My Real Voice* (Zhao, 2012). With the popular of *The Voice of China*, *My Real Voice* also attracted huge social attention. This spin-off show played an important role in answering the public inquiries about the authenticity of contestants and maintain

brand image of *The Voice of China*.

Table 2: The Ratings of Singing Competition Shows in 2012 Summer (continued)

Show	Channel	Average Ratings		Ratings of The First Three Months	
		Ratings%	Shares%	Ratings%	Shares%
<i>The Voice of China</i>	Zhejiang Satellite Channel	3.81	12.06	1.82	5.79
<i>Asian Wave</i>	Dragon TV	0.64	2.51	0.24	1.04
<i>Ramzing Voice</i>	Shangdong Satellite Channel	0.42	1.93	0.30	1.60
<i>Perfect Voice</i>	Yunnan Satellite	0.33	2.06	0.12	0.93

	Channel				
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Source: The CSM Media Research,

<http://www.csm.com.cn/index.php/knowledge/showArticle/kaid/867.html>

In recent years, more and more Chinese media companies prefer to purchase the TV formats. Among such many imported TV formats, *The Voice of China* obtained a huge success not only because the successful format but only owed to the environment of the Chinese television market. Take the first half of 2012 as an example, 246 original television formats were produced in the United Kingdom, accounted for twenty percent of the global total with an average of forty each month. Holland and Japan following close behind, accounted for fourteen percent share and twelve percent share respectively (Guo, 2012). Compared to these countries, China's television market was lack of creative TV shows and the majority of TV stations tended to buy the overseas formats. Therefore, the suitable adaptation played an essential role to make *The Voice of China* stand out from other homogeneous shows. The results of the questionnaire showed that almost forty percent of the participants' favorites TV program was talent show and thirteen

percent indicated game show was their preference (Figure 7). As a singing competition show, *The Voice of China* took a lot of advantages in terms of the television genre. During the process of the show, it created an unprecedented mode of cooperation in Chinese television history. The production company and the TV station shared the profits and the risk. Beside, the new part of story telling in *The Voice of China* has also contributed to the show's success. In other versions of The Voice, the relationship between the contestants and the show would be terminated after the season finale. However, *The Voice of China* took a longer view of the contestants' future singing career. The production company of *The Voice of China* also launched a V-house project, in which they provided the contestants a place to make live performance even though they left the stage of the show (Zhao, 2012). They have already made deals with two pub chains and are in talks with some property agencies in relation to venues for regular concerts, tours and other events. Besides, a spin-off movie *I Want You* for the contestants of *The Voice of China* was released in 2013 (Zhao, 2012).

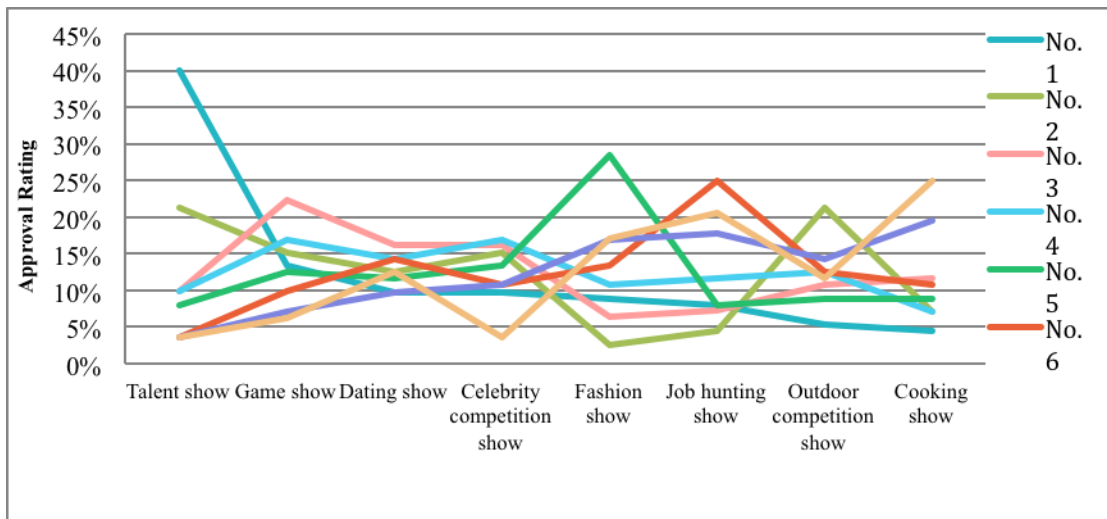


Figure 7: The Ranking of Favorite TV Genres

5.3 Limitations

The research took *The Voice of China* as an example to study the adaptation of western format TV in the Chinese markets. In terms of the singing competition show, there was no significant regional difference between *The Voice of China* and *The Voice of Holland* or other versions. This was one of the reasons why the format of *The Voice* could spread so many countries with different culture background. Nevertheless, the format TV included various kinds of shows and it was not limited in the genre of talent show. Therefore, it is hard to say the success of *The Voice of China* was mostly due to its mature

format or the local adaptation. Additionally, *The Voice of China* was a China's television show essentially even though it was localized by the original version from Holland. Considering this issue, the research was restricted to analyze *The Voice of China* under the environment of the Chinese television market solely instead of global perspective. In regard to the questionnaire, the limitation was related to the age distribution. The major audience of *The Voice of China* was in 18-35 age groups and meanwhile all of the selected participants must have watched this show before. Besides, this age bracket preferred to use social media than elder generation. Hence, the results of the study in promotional platform and strategies were biased.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

According to the results of study, there are several recommendations for future research. In order to analyze the adaptation of format TV comprehensively, future studies should compare different genres of television and research on which TV formats suit the Chinese market and which shows are better for adaption. Some of the limitation outlined in the survey may be minimized or eliminated in terms of the sample size and age

distribution. Moreover, most of the participants in the survey only watched one version of *The Voice*, either Chinese version or American version. For the future research, the survey should be distributed among the audiences who have watched the original version as well as some other adaptations in different countries.

5.5 Conclusion

The mature format and unique competition rules made a great contribution to the success of *The Voice of China*. For those talent shows before *The Voice*, coaches controlled the right of selection in the past. This show provided the contestants an opportunity to choose their favorite mentors. Only vocal performance was the standard in this show. These creative elements made *The Voice of China* to attract more audiences' attention. Instead of simply copying the original format from Holland, *The Voice of China* added story-telling parts for catering the television viewing habits of the Chinese audience. This great adaptation of exploring stories behind the stage played an important role to help the contestants to show their personality and how they achieved their music dream.

Apart from the format itself, *The Voice of China* took full advantage of new media as a platform to promote the show. It launched its official Weibo account to engage the users to interact with the contestants and make hot topic on Internet. The team of four judges including Liu Huan, Na Ying, Harlem Yu, and Yang Kun also showed their personalities in the show. Sometimes they shared their music stories with the contestants, sometimes they even cried during the live recording. The interaction between the judges and the contestants became one of distinctive characteristics of *The Voice of China*. The celebrity effect of the four judges could appeal more viewers' attention and increase the ratings.

Furthermore, a new way of organizing the collaboration between the production company and the TV station has also contributed to the show's success. It is the first time in the Chinese television history that a production company and a TV station to form a joint venture, a partnership in which both parties shared both the revenue and the risk. This new approach made the TV station and the production company perform their respective duties: Zhejiang TV put forth their best effort in advertising and Canxing invested a large sum of money to ensure everything was high quality.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire of *The Voice of China*

1. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

2. What is your age?

- 18-35
- 36-49
- Above 50

3. How did you get to know *The Voice of China*?

- Newspaper
- Magazine
- Radio
- Television
- Social Media (Weibo, Renren, Wechat)
- Others

4. Which is the most attractive element of *The Voice of China* to you?

- Blind auditions
- Celebrity effect
- Behind stories
- Vocal performance
- Others

5. Which is your favorite part of *The Voice of China*?

- Blind auditions
- Battle rounds

- Knockout rounds
- Final performance
- Finale

6. Which is your favorite western format TV among the following shows?

- *The Voice of China*
- *China's Got Talent*
- *Chinese Idol*
- *The X Factor* (Chinese version)
- *Tonight's the Night* (Chinese version)
- *Generation Show* (Chinese version)
- *Take Me Out* (Chinese version)
- *Your Face Sounds Familiar* (Chinese version)
- Others

7. According to your preference, please rank the following TV genres.

- Talent show
- Game show
- Dating show
- Celebrity competition show
- Fashion show
- Job hunting show
- Outdoor competition show
- Cooking show